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ABSTRACT

An ecological framework for predicting citizen participation in grassroots community organizations and predicting community disorder problems (such as crime and fear) was developed and tested. The framework, which is called an ecological framework for sustainable community learning and development, delineates the relevant economic, political, social, and physical environment factors and makes distinctions between stable and transient predictors. The framework's relevance to the following items was discussed: community development (social capital); community psychology; the relationship between environment and behavior; and ecological research methods. The framework was then used as a backdrop for discussing two examples of sustainable development in the United States. The first example was a participatory action research process called the Block Booster Project. The second example was a service learning project designed to redevelop a blighted area. (The bibliography lists 40 references. An appendix contains lists of the following items: 4 service learning resources on the Internet; 23 sample questions for student journals or reflection discussions; 9 general learning principles; and 10 questions to address when starting and teaching a service learning course.) (MN)

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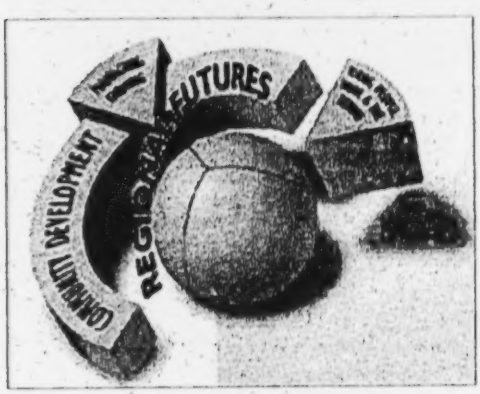
An International Symposium



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Community Psychology, Planning, and Learning: A U.S. Perspective on Sustainable Development

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An ecological framework for sustainable community learning and development and social capital is presented. Two examples of sustainable development in the U.S. are briefly discussed, both involving currently hot movements in community planning: cohousing and the "new urbanism." A participatory action research process and service-learning, an educational movement in the U.S., are discussed as collaborative "learning communities." It is concluded that sustainability should be defined not only in economic and traditional ecological terms, but also in terms of a social ecology that includes the development of community psychological ties (sense of community, communitarianism, place attachment, pride in one's home and community, community confidence and satisfaction), as well as neighboring, citizen participation, and organizational efficacy.

I wish to stress at the outset that the subtitle of this address is "a U.S. perspective on sustainable development," not "the U.S. perspective." There are no doubt as many U.S. perspectives on community development and education as there are Americans engaged in them. As a community and environmental psychologist who uses multiple approaches and methods to assist and study urban community development organizations, I could just as well have used "a multidisciplinary" or "an ecological perspective" as a subtitle. I don't call it an "urban" or "psychological" perspective because I think it is more broadly applicable than those terms imply.

I will begin by presenting an ecological framework for sustainable community learning and development which interprets sustainability in two ways which may be both familiar and unfamiliar. I will then offer two examples of sustainable development in the U.S., both involving currently hot movements in community planning. I will conclude with an action research process and an educational momement in the U.S. which exemplify collaborative "learning communities."

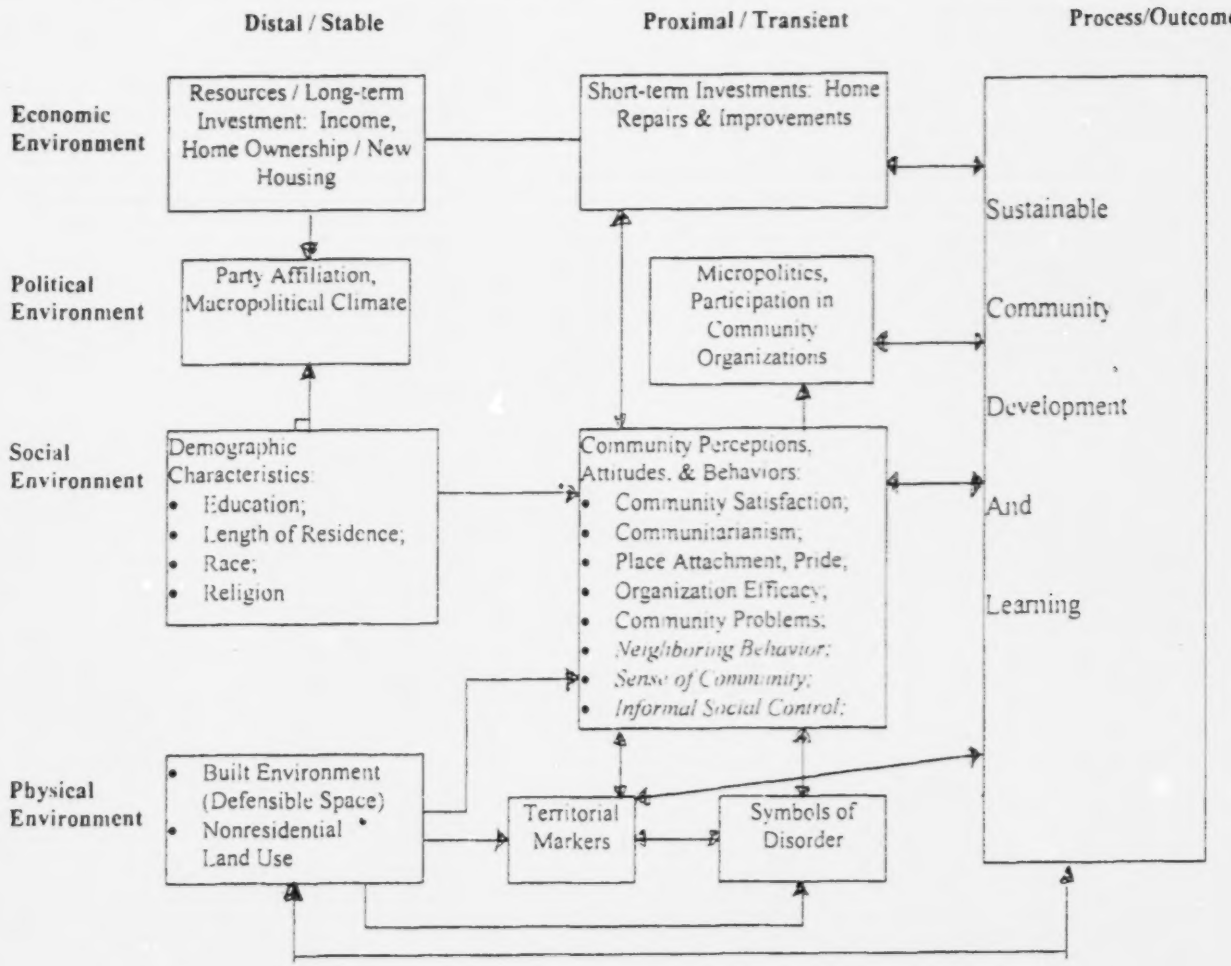
So what are the two ways in which sustainability is both familiar and unfamiliar? First, sustainability ought to imply an ecological consciousness. But sustainable development theories, research, programs, and policies do not always take a completely ecological perspective in terms of carefully considering the systemic interrelationships among the social, political, economic, and physical environment.

An Ecological Framework for Sustainable Community Learning and Development

I have formulated and tested an ecological framework for predicting citizen participation in grassroots community organizations as well as predicting community disorder problems, such as crime and fear (see Figure 1). This ecological framework may be even more appropriate for analysing community learning and development more broadly because, by its very nature, community development is about improving the economic, social, political, and physical environment.

What makes this framework ecological is that it attempts to delineate the relevant environmental factors associated with sustainable community learning and development outcomes, including the economic, political, social, and physical environments. But the most important dimension of the framework may be the distinction between more distal, stable or even permanent predictors and proximal, transient or changeable predictors.

Figure 1. An Ecological Framework for Community Development



Stable factors include such economic resources as income and property ownership, party affiliation and macropolitical climate, demographic characteristics, such as education, length of residence, race, and religion, and the built environment, including residential, nonresidential, and open land uses. The problem with stable factors is that by definition they are difficult or impossible to change.

Transient factors include short-term economic investments, such as home or capital repairs & and improvements, the level of participation in grassroots community organizations, and in particular, community perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, which are discussed in more depth below.

Community Development

Social Capital. The second way in which sustainability may be both familiar and unfamiliar is that it implies the development and maintenance of community "social capital" (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993, 1995), or participation (see Table 1). Two environmental psychologists, Saegert & Winkel (in press) found social capital to consist of four factors: informal participation (or what I and others call neighboring behavior), perceived prosocial norms, and (formal) leadership activity and basic resident association participation.

Table 1. Social Capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993, 1995)

Saegert & Winkel (1998)'s factors:
Informal Participation (Neighboring)
(Informan) Perceived Prosocial Norms
(Formal) Leadership Activity
(Formal) Basic Resident Association Participation

Assuming then that social capital includes both formal and informal participation, it is important to carefully examine and understand not only the differences between both forms of participation, formal and informal, but also the various factors and processes that make up and are related to each form.

At the risk of sacrilege, let me voice a concern with "social capital" in that, like "empowerment" and possibly "sustainability," it has become a conceptually vague buzzword which is being used by many different people to mean many different things or, in some cases, to mean very little. In the Utah State legislature, the Social Capital Enhancement Act requires government workers to turn away all first requests for services, no matter how legitimate, and forces those in need to seek those services in the already overburdened private community service sector. Only if that fails can citizens go back to state government for help.

Community Psychology

My primary field, community psychology, has developed a tremendous amount of theory, research and action on the specific elements and processes of the transient community social environment listed in Figure 1 , including those contributing to the development of social capital (see Table 2). These include such community-focused perceptions as the awareness of community problems and confidence in the future of one's community and in the efficacy of local community organizations in dealing with those problems (Perkins & Brown, 1996; Perkins & Taylor, 1996; Perkins et al., 1990; 1996; Skogan, 1990; Taylor, 1987).

A great deal of research has looked closely at what constitutes and how to encourage various kinds of community psychological ties, such as sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Plas & Lewis, 1996; Sarason, 1974), communitarianism (or the value people place on their community and on working collectively to improve it; Etzioni, 1993; Perkins et al., 1990), place attachment (which can be a valuable resource to individuals, families, and communities; Altman & Low, 1991; Fried, 1982; Perkins & Brown, 1996; Perkins et al., 1996), community satisfaction (which my research has found to be positively related to perceived community problems, not negatively; i.e., those who perceive more problems are more satisfied with their community as a place to live; Bardo, 1984; Hughey & Bardo, 1987; Loo, 1986; Miller et al., 1980; Perkins et al., 1990; 1996). The latest psychological tie my colleague Barb Brown and I have begun to study is home and community pride (Perkins & Brown, 1996).

Table 2. Community Social Environment:

Perceptions (Perkins & Brown, 1996; Perkins & Taylor, 1996; Perkins et al., 1990; 1996; Skogan, 1990; Taylor, 1987; Wilson & Kelling, 1982):

- Community Problems: e.g., crime, disorder
- Community Confidence and Organizational Efficacy(in addressing community problems)
- Community Psychological Ties:values, attitudes, emotions
- Sense of Community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Plas & Lewis, 1996; Sarason, 1974)
- Communitarianism (Etzioni, 1993; Perkins et al., 1990)
- Place Attachment (Altman & Low, 1991; Fried, 1982; Perkins & Brown, 1996; Perkins et al., 1996)
- Community Satisfaction (Bardo, 1984; Hughey & Bardo, 1987; Loo, 1986; Miller et al., 1980; Perkins et al., 1990; 1996)
- Home & Community Pride (Perkins & Brown, 1996)

Behaviors

- (Informal) Neighboring (Perkins et al., 1990; 1996; Unger & Wandersman, 1982, 1985)
- Informal Social Control (Greenberg & Rohe, 1986; Kelling & Coles, 1996; Wilson & Kelling, 1982)
- Formal Resident Participation (Perkins et al., 1990; 1996; Saegert & Winkel, 1997, in press)Community psychology has focused not only on these important internal psycho logical processes, but also on tangible behaviors such as informal neighboring (Perkins et al., 1990; 1996; Unger & Wandersman, 1982, 1985), informal social control (or people's willingness to intervene to uphold community standards of behavior; Greenberg & Rohe, 1986; Kelling & Coles, 1996), and finally my special interest: formal citizen participation in grassroots community organizations (Perkins et al., 1990; 1996; Saegert & Winkel, 1996, 1998).

Environment and Behavior

The interdisciplinary field of environment and behavior focuses on the influence of the natural and particularly the built environment on human behavior. In addition to the more or less permanent features of the built and open physical environment, much of my own work, and that of colleagues in this area, has explored the more transient, and therefore malleable, environment, including both positive signs of territoriality, such as personalizing or otherwise beautifying one's home exterior or community (Brown, 1987; Brown, & Altman, 1981; Taylor, 1988) and also negative symbols of disorder. The latter includes both social incivilities, such as disorderly conduct, and physical incivilities, such as litter, graffiti, vandalism, and poor property maintenance (Kelling & Coles, 1996; Perkins & Taylor, 1996; Skogan, 1990; Taylor, 1987).

Ecological Research Methods

(see Table 4)

A final note on taking a truly ecological perspective on community learning, development, and sustainability research is that one's methods should also be ecologically valid (Perkins & Taylor, 1996). Ideally, that means using multiple measures, including direct, systematic and objective and/or participant observations, resident (and/or organization member or leader) surveys, qualitative methods (e.g., content analysis of open-ended interviews or other recorded communications, such as news media), and archival data such as census, health, educational, economic, and other social indicators.

Ecological validity also means analyzing the data at multiple levels, including individual and/or households, individuals relative to their group, aggregate (i.e., group, community), and simultaneous multilevel analysis (eg, Hierarchical Linear Models; Perkins & Taylor, 1996).

Examples of Sustainable Development in the U.S.: Community Planning

Cohousing

Cohousing (McCamant & Durrett, 1994) is a housing-based self-help community development movement which started in Northern Europe 25 years ago and has since 1985 spread to about 40 mostly highly

educated communities in the U.S. and two in Hobart, Tasmania. It is a "self-help" movement in that the planning, design, decision-making, and daily life of these intentional communities is highly participatory, consensus-oriented, and communal. Professional architects and planners may be involved in the building process, but they are viewed as necessary, but ancillary, expert resources.

Table 3. Community Physical Environment:

Stable:
- Built Environment (e.g., Defensible Space: Jacobs, 1961; Newman, 1972)
- Nonresidential Land Use (Taylor et al., 1995)

Transient::
- Territorial Markers (Brown, 1987; Brown, & Altman, 1981; Taylor, 1988)
- Incivilities: Symbols of Disorder (Kelling & Coles, 1996; Perkins & Taylor, 1996; Skogan, 1990; Taylor, 1987; Wilson & Kelling, 1982)

Table 4. Ecological Methods for Measuring Community Social and Physical Environments (Perkins & Taylor, 1996):

Multiple Measures
- Block Environmental Inventory
- Resident (or Organization Member or Leader) Survey
- Qualitative Methods (e.g., content analysis of open-ended interviews or other recorded communications, such as news media).
- Archival data (e.g., census, health, educational, economic, and other social indicators)

Multiple Levels:
- Individual
- Individual Relative to Group
- Aggregate (Group, Community)
- Multilevel Analysis (eg, Hierarchical Linear Models)

The design, cost, and communal life of cohousing developments vary. But all have a shared community building in addition to private single-family dwellings, a certain number of weekly communal meals and other activities, and a layout that keeps motor vehicles on the periphery of the community.

New Urbanism

An even larger community design and planning movement in the U.S. which has among other goals the reduction of automobile traffic and domination is the New Urbanism, or neotraditional or transit-oriented design (Calthorpe,1993; Katz, 1994). The New Urbanism encourages mixed or at least proximal commercial and residential land use with multi-modal public transport hubs and community civic centers dispersed to create smaller, more tight-knit communities than one typically finds in most of modern suburbia.

Table 5. Examples of Sustainable Development and Collaborative Learning Communities in the U.S.

Examples of sustainable development in the U.S.: Community Planning

Cohousing (McCamant & Durrett, 1994)
New Urbanism (Calthorpe,1993; Katz, 1994)
Examples of Collaborative Learning Communities in the U.S.:
Participatory Action Research (e.g., Block Booster Process)
Service Learning in Community Development (Reardon, 1994)

Like cohousing, the New Urbanism also uses slightly smaller residential property sizes and so higher population density in order to preserve nearby open space for parks, farms, and bushland. It is an attempt to plan and design to encourage all the community psychological ties and behaviors I have discussed, including sense of community, and informal social control through greater use of outdoor space. Its scope may give it greater potential for social and cultural change compared to cohousing. But it has thus far paid less attention to the learning and participatory aspects of community building than ~~cohousing.~~

Examples of Collaborative Learning Communities in the U.S.

Block Booster Process

The original participatory action research that produced and tested the ecological framework for community development I presented was the Block Booster Project. It was funded by the Ford Foundation to examine the role of residential block associations in community development and crime control. It was participatory in that community leaders were involved from the beginning as collaborators in the formulation of all aspects of project design. And it was action research in that one central aspect was a series of workshops to help the block associations and leaders improve the functioning and viability of their organizations (Florin, Chavis, Wandersman & Rich, 1992). We provided both general practical information on managing voluntary associations as well as survey-based and other data specific to their local blocks to help them know how members and other residents felt about community, organisational, and leadership issues and problems. The result was the creation of neighborhood-based learning communities of resident leaders and researchers.

Service Learning

Service-learning — the testing and illumination of primary, secondary, college, or graduate course content through participatory student projects that address local needs— is currently a hot pedagogical movement in the U.S. It may seem like merely the kind of practical or experiential learning that is as old as vocational or professional training or simply good teaching. But there are some new principles, such as varied opportunities for individual and group reflection, which in combination constitute a new and uniquely community-focused learning process. Service-learning is of course perfectly suited for community development-related courses Reardon, 1994). Service-learning takes the idea of a "learning community" very literally and seriously in exploring concrete ways to bring students, local government officials, community development practitioners and researchers, and community residents and leaders together to learn and benefit from each other. It adds reality and relevance to the curriculum by bringing to life dry classroom materials, by showing how social processes really work (and often do not work as planned) in the unpredictable and complex world of realpolitik, and by giving students skills, experience, and connections that often lead to employment opportunities.

More often than not, service-learning is a "win-win-win-win situation." The winners are (1) the instructor, whose teaching is brought to life and made more relevant through application to the "real world;" (2) the students, who almost unanimously report getting alot more out of the course, not only practical skills and experience and a "foot in the door" of a potential employer, but also greater political awareness and a more developed sense of communitarianism and civic responsibility; (3) the clients of the host organization, who usually get more personal attention and energetic bodies to help with their problems; and (4) the host organizations, who get unskilled, semi-skilled, and even skilled labor and a chance to test the performance of possible future workers, both at little to no cost.

I have incorporated service learning into almost all the courses I have taught at Utah. About a thousand undergraduates and ten graduate students have helped plan, conduct, and report on my various community service/research projects, which have provided useful information to a wide variety of public and private organizations (including community councils, service agencies, an ecumenical religious service and anti-poverty advocacy organization, and various city agencies and councils) with whom the students worked. The projects also had a clearly positive and lasting impact on the students' learning, as evidenced by their application of ideas and observations from the project to later course work.

Here is an example of a typical community service-learning project in one of my classes. In late 1995, I was contacted by a city councilman. The local Redevelopment Agency (RDA) was about to designate a portion of his district a blighted area and he, the RDA, and the local community council wanted a community needs assessment to guide redevelopment plans. This project involved two classes, a total of 50 students, plus some campus community service center volunteers. The goals for the project were: (a) canvassing the neighborhood, distributing community service information, and conducting resident and small business interviews, (b) identifying potential block leaders throughout the target neighborhood, (c) helping those leaders develop organizing plans based on data specific to their own block as well as neighborhood-level information, and (d) involving students in community research and community action. The student-written project report went to all the above groups and leaders and also the local community police officers and the other city councilman from the area. In addition, forums were held at the university, first to present the neighborhood results and later to discuss the organizing plans.

[See the service learning tables in the Appendix.]

Conclusion

I believe the most important test of these four or, for that matter, any experiments in community building and the creation of learning communities may be their sustainability. And I further believe that sustainability must be defined not only in economic and traditional ecological terms, but also in terms of a social ecology that goes beyond the idea of people as capital to include the development of community psychological ties (such as a sense of community, communitarianism, place attachment, pride in one's home and community, community confidence and satisfaction), as well as neighboring, citizen participation, and organizational efficacy. Neither communities nor voluntary associations can long be sustained without them.

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Appendix: Service Learning Resources

Service-Learning resources on the Internet

Communications for a Sustainable Future Service-Learning website: http://csf.colorado.EDU:80/sl/main.html

To subscribe to the Service-Learning list (for students, faculty, job-seekers, etc.), send the message: sub service-learning Yourfirstname Yourlastname to listproc@csf.colorado.edu

National Service-Learning Cooperative Clearinghouse (ERIC): http://www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu

International Partnership for Service-Learning: http://www.studyabroad.com/psl

Sample Questions for Student Journals or Reflection Discussions

Reflections on the readings:

9. Students should not be coerced into participating in any kind of service activities with which they are uncomfortable for any reason.

Questions to Address when starting & Teaching a Service-Learning Course

Planning the Service

1. What type of service compliments the content of your class?
2. What organizations exist to address needs in this field? Which ones have a coordinator of volun teers?
3. Is there an unmet community need that students could serve? What will they be doing (should be a meaningful learning experience)?
4. Does your class timeline fit with the scope of the project and the host organization's schedule? Can you schedule on-site orientations with the organization's staff? Can the staff participate in your classroom reflection sessions?
5. How many hours of service will you and the host organization expect each student to perform (rule of thumb: 2 hours/week (3 credits), 3 hrs./wk. (4 cr.)

Planning the Curriculum

6. How will you help students relate the service experience to course content?
7. How will you monitor student experiences in the community (journals, in-class reflection, 1-on-1 meetings, course evaluations)? How will the host organization monitor the students (evaluation forms, personal or phone contact, etc.)? What are your specific goals of the SL project for (a) students, (b) clients, (c) host organization, (d) research?
8. How can you help students understand that a goal of any SL class is to help them become better, participating citizens in their communities?
9. When and how will you conduct reflection sessions?
10. Does the project or curriculum contain potentially controversial material? If so, how will you deal with it in a fair manner?

(based on Service-Learning in the Curriculum by the Bennion Community Service Center at the Univ. of Utah)

1. What principles, information, or examples from the readings are relevant to problems in my serv ice setting or my own community? Which problems and how are those parts of the reading rel evant?
2. What principles, information, or examples from the readings are relevant to my service? How?
3. How effective are the readings in helping me reach my goals for the service-learning experience? How can it become more effective?
4. What other readings or information (e.g., from other courses) is relevant to the issues discussed in the readings, this course, and/or my community service? How?

Reflections on community service:

5. What service did you provide? Do you feel you made a difference?
6. What obstacles did you encounter? How did you overcome them?
7. What did you observe? Did anything surprise you?
8. What did you learn about the people you are working with?
9. How do you think you are perceived?
10. What did you learn about yourself? How do your preconceptions affect your work?
11. Does the agency or setting you are volunteering in promote or contradict your own values? How so and what are those values?
12. What skills, knowledge, and personal strengths do you bring to this community service work that can help the clients?
13. What skills, knowledge, and personal strengths do the clients bring that can be used or developed to help themselves?
14. What goals do you have for yourself in this community service experience? How can you reach those goals? Be specific. (Toward the end of the project: have you reached those goals? If not, why not?)
15. What goals do the clients have? How can they reach those goals? (Toward the end of the project: have they reached those goals? If not, why not?)
16. How effective is the agency or setting you are volunteering in at helping you reach your goals for this service-learning experience? How can it become more effective?
17. How effective is the agency or setting you are volunteering in at helping the clients reach their goals? How can it become more effective?
18. Has your role changed over time?
19. Has your definition of "service" changed?
20. How does your service connect to broader social issues?

Reflections on the course:

21. How effective is the course in helping you reach your goals for this service-learning experience? How can it become more effective?
22. How relevant is the course to your major? How can it be made more relevant?
23. How effective is the course in preparing you for a career? How can it become more effective?

Nine General Learning Principles

1. Students provide a needed service to individuals or non-profit organizations in the community.
2. The service experience relates to the subject matter of the course.
3. Activities in the class provide methods for students to think about what they learned through the service experience.
4. The course offers a way to assess the learning derived from the service. Credit is given for learn ing, not for service alone.
5. Service interactions in the community recognize the needs of service recipients and offer an opportunity for recipients to be involved in the evaluation of the service.
6. The service opportunities are aimed at the development of the civic education of students even though they may also be focused on career preparation.
7. Knowledge from the discipline informs the service experiences with which the students are involved.
8. The class offers a way to learn from other class members as well as from the instructor.

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